

Remarks at a Rededication Ceremony at the Islamic Center of Washington June 27, 2007

The President. Imam, thank you very much. Thank you for inviting me. I bring my personal respect to you, sir.

Imam Abdullah Khouj. Thank you, sir.

The President. And I appreciate your friendship. I too want to thank the governors of the Islamic Center. I welcome the Ambassadors. Thank you all for coming. I appreciate other distinguished guests who are here. It is an honor to join you at this rededication ceremony.

As the Imam mentioned, half a century has passed since one of our great leaders welcomed the Islamic Center into our Nation's family of faith. Dedicating this site, President Dwight D. Eisenhower offered America's hand in friendship to Muslims around the world. He asked that together we commit ourselves "to peaceful progress of all men under one God."

Today we gather with friendship and respect to reaffirm that pledge and to renew our determination to stand together in the pursuit of freedom and peace. We come to express our appreciation for a faith that has enriched civilization for centuries. We come in celebration of America's diversity of faith and our unity as free people. And we hold in our hearts the ancient wisdom of the great Muslim poet, Rumi: "The lamps are different, but the light is the same."

Moments like this dedication help clarify who Americans are as a people and what we wish for the world. We live in a time when there are questions about America and her intentions. For those who seek a true understanding of our country, they need to look no farther than here. This Muslim center sits quietly down the road from a synagogue, a Lutheran church, a Catholic parish, a Greek Orthodox chapel, a Buddhist temple, each with faithful followers who practice their deeply held beliefs and live side by side in peace.

This is what freedom offers: societies where people can live and worship as they choose without intimidation, without suspicion, without a knock on the door from the secret police. The freedom of religion is the very first protection offered in America's Bill of Rights. It is a precious freedom. It is a basic compact under which people of faith agree not to impose their spiritual vision on others and, in return, to practice their own beliefs as they see fit. This is the promise of our Constitution and the calling of our conscience and a source of our strength.

The freedom to worship is so central to America's character that we tend to take it personally when that freedom is denied to others. Our country was a leading voice on behalf of the Jewish refuseniks in the Soviet Union. Americans joined in common cause with Catholics and Protestants who prayed in secret behind an Iron Curtain. America has stood with Muslims seeking to freely practice their beliefs in places such as Burma and China.

To underscore America's respect for the Muslim faith here at home, I came to this center 6 days after the 9/11 attacks to denounce incidents of prejudice against Muslim Americans. Today I am announcing a new initiative that will improve mutual understanding and cooperation between America and people in predominately Muslim countries.

I will appoint a special envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference. This is the first time a President has made such an appointment to the OIC. Our special envoy will listen to and learn from representatives from Muslim states and will share with them America's views and values. This is an opportunity for Americans to demonstrate to Muslim communities our interest in respectful dialog and continued friendship.

We have seen that friendship reflected in the outpouring of support Americans have extended to Muslim communities across the globe during times of war and natural disaster. Americans came to the aid of the victims of devastating earthquakes in Pakistan and Iran and responded with urgency and compassion to the wreckage of the tsunami in Indonesia and Malaysia. Our country defended Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Today, we are rallying the world to confront genocide in Sudan. Americans of all beliefs have undertaken these efforts out of compassion, conviction, and conscience.

The greatest challenge facing people of conscience is to help the forces of moderation win the great struggle against extremism that is now playing out across the broader Middle East. We've seen the expansion of the concept of religious freedom and individual rights in every region of the world except one. In the Middle East, we have seen instead the rise of a group of extremists who seek to use religion as a path to power and a means of domination.

These self-appointed vanguard—this self-appointed vanguard presumes to speak for Muslims. They do not. They call all Muslims who do not believe in their harsh and hateful ideology “infidels” and “betrayers of the true Muslim faith.” This enemy falsely claims that America is at war with Muslims and the Muslim faith, when in fact it is these radicals who are Islam's true enemy.

They staged spectacular attacks on Muslim holy sites to divide Muslims and make them fight one another. The majority of the victims of their acts of terror are Muslims. In Afghanistan, they have targeted teachers for beatings and murder. In Iraq, they killed a young boy and then boobytrapped his body so it would explode when his family came to retrieve him. They put children in the backseat of a car so they could pass a security checkpoint and then blew up the car with the children still inside. These enemies bombed a wed-

ding reception in Amman, Jordan, a housing complex in Saudi Arabia, a hotel in Jakarta. They claim to undertake these acts of butchery and mayhem in the name of Allah. Yet this enemy is not the true face of Islam; this enemy is the face of hatred.

Men and women of conscience have a duty to speak out and condemn these—this murderous movement before it finds its path to power. We must help millions of Muslims as they rescue a proud and historic religion from murderers and beheaders who seek to soil the name of Islam. And in this effort, modern Muslim leaders have the most powerful and influential voice. We admire and thank those Muslims who have denounced what the Secretary General of the OIC called radical fringe elements who pretend that they act in the name of Islam. We must encourage more Muslim leaders to add to their voices, to speak out against radical extremists who infiltrate mosques, to denounce organizations that use the veneer of Islamic belief to support and fund acts of violence, and to reach out to young Muslims—even in our own country and elsewhere in the free world—who believe suicide bombing may someday be justified.

We need to rally the voices of Muslims who can speak most directly to millions in the Arab world left behind in the global movement toward prosperity and freedom. For decades, the free world abandoned Muslims in the Middle East to tyrants and terrorists and hopelessness. This was done in the interests of stability and peace, but instead the approach brought neither. The Middle East became an incubator for terrorism and despair, and the result was an increase in Muslims' hostility to the West. I have invested the heart of my Presidency in helping Muslims fight terrorism and claim their liberty and find their own unique paths to prosperity and peace.

The efforts underway in Afghanistan and Iraq are central in this struggle, but that struggle is not going to end the threats; it's not going to end there. We believe the

ultimate success of Afghans and Iraqis will inspire others who want to live in freedom as well. We will work toward a day when a democratic Palestine lives side by side with Israel in peace. We have seen stirrings of a democratic future in other parts of the Middle East, though it will take time for liberty to flower. A democratic future is not a plan imposed by Western nations; it is a future that the people of the region will seize for themselves. A future of freedom is the dream and the desire of every loving heart.

We know this because of the 8 million people who braved threats and intimidation to vote in Afghanistan. We know this because of the nearly 12 million people who cast ballots in free elections in Iraq. And we know this because the world watched as the citizens of Lebanon raised the banner of the Cedar Revolution, drove out their Syrian occupiers, and chose new leaders under free elections. Even now the hope for freedom is felt in some dark corners in the Middle East, whispering in living rooms and coffee houses and in classrooms. Millions seek a path to the future

where they can say what they think, travel where they wish, and worship as they choose. They plead in silence for their liberty, and they hope someone, somewhere will answer.

So today, in this place of free worship, in the heart of a free nation, we say to those who yearn for freedom from Damascus to Tehran: You are not bound forever by your misery. You plead in silence no longer. The free world hears you. You are not alone. America offers you its hand in friendship. We work for the day when we can welcome you into the family of free nations. We pray that you and your children may one day know freedom at all things, including the freedom to love and to worship the Almighty God.

May God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:08 a.m. at the mosque. In his remarks, he referred to Imam Abdullah Khouj, director, the Islamic Center of Washington, DC; and Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, secretary general, Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Remarks Following a Discussion on Health Care

June 27, 2007

Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here. I just finished a really interesting and good discussion with a group of distinguished health care experts. I appreciate you all taking your time. Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here as well.

These men and women have different specialties, different backgrounds, and different ideas, but they all agree on the—an important fact: America's health care system is in need of serious reform. And I agree. The American people share that belief as well. In my conversations with Republicans and Democrats and businessowners and workers, I hear the

same concerns: America's health care is too costly, it's too confusing, it leaves too many people uninsured.

The fundamental question is, what should we do about it? On that question, our Nation has a clear choice. One option is to put more power in the hands of government by expanding Federal health care programs and empowering bureaucrats to make medical decisions. The other option is to put more power in the hands of individuals by making private health insurance more affordable and accessible and empowering people and their doctors to make the